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Operation Lifesaver unveils Rail Safety Challenge in conjunction with Level Crossing Awareness Day

Safety nonprofit joins with State agencies, independent truckers to reduce truck-train crossing collisions

GRAIN VALLEY, MO, June 9, 2011 – Statistics show that approximately one out of four railroad crossing crashes in the U.S. involve vehicles that require a Commercial Driver License (CDL) to operate. To address this issue, Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI, www.oli.org) unveiled its Rail Safety for Professional Drivers e-Learning program here with the support of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA, www.OOIDA.com), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, and the Missouri Department of Transportation. The Rail Safety Challenge e-Learning program is an interactive experience that puts drivers behind the wheel of a truck for a 'virtual' road trip.

The event takes place on International Level Crossing Awareness Day (ILCAD), which was started in 2010 to stress the importance of safety around highway-rail grade crossings.

"The number of highway-rail vehicle incidents and crashes involving CDL vehicles in Missouri increased in 2010 from 2009," said Missouri Operation Lifesaver State Coordinator Rick Mooney. "As the leader in highway-rail grade crossing safety education, Operation Lifesaver is pleased to offer trucking companies, independent drivers and other organizations the opportunity to use this state of the art safety program designed specifically for professional drivers. Our goal with this program is to reduce the number of these incidents and as a result, lessen the human and financial toll of crossing crashes. "

A preview of the Rail Safety for Professional Drivers e-Learning program is available at <http://bit.ly/kcFLL5>. The e-Learning program was made possible by a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration. <http://www.fra.dot.gov/>.

Todd Spencer, Executive Vice President of OOIDA; Captain Tim Hull, Public Information Director, MO State Highway Patrol; and Rod Massman, Railroad Administrator, MoDOT joined Operation Lifesaver officials at the launch event.

"We want to make sure our members know about the possible dangers and that they are fully aware of any safety tools available to them that would prevent these types of collisions," said OOIDA's Spenser.

"Currently the State of Missouri is experiencing a 14% decrease in the number of highway traffic deaths for all vehicle crashes compared to the same time period last year. When one-fourth of all train/vehicle crashes involve trucks or truck-trailers, regardless of the weight of the truck, they are no match for a locomotive pulling 100 rail cars. We are pleased to have this new tool available for truck drivers to learn how to be safe at railroad crossings," said Hull.

"MoDOT is proud to work with our partners in the trucking industry, the highway patrol and Missouri Operation Lifesaver in order to promote rail-highway crossing safety and to prevent train-vehicle accidents," said Rod Massman, MoDOT's rail administrator. "We would like to emphasize that the 3 E's – engineering, enforcement and education – are all equally important in promoting and understanding crossing safety. MoDOT continues to promote these three ideals through its construction programs in erecting new lights and gates at crossings, being a supportive member of Missouri Operation Lifesaver and in continuing to sponsor and participate in numerous rail safety events across our state."

Mooney noted that the e-Learning program's simulated driving environment allows drivers to work independently and exposes them to worst-case scenarios that require quick thinking and critical decision-making. "With Operation Lifesaver's e-Learning program, drivers gain safety experience without incurring injuries, fatalities, or fleet damage," he concluded.

About the e-Learning program

Individual drivers can go online to take the **Rail Safety Challenge** at www.oli.org. *(Under Quick Links in the top left corner, click on "Pro Driver e-Learning.")* There is no charge for individual professional drivers to participate. The course does not capture scores, names or email addresses, only the number of people who complete the Challenge. Large companies who wish to incorporate this program into their training should contact Operation Lifesaver at 1-800-537-6224.

About Operation Lifesaver

Operation Lifesaver is a national, non-profit safety education group whose goal is to eliminate deaths and injuries at railroad crossings and along railroad rights of way. It has programs in all 50 states with trained and certified presenters who provide free safety talks to raise awareness around tracks and trains. Learn more at www.oli.org.

About International Level Crossing Awareness Day (ILCAD)

International Level Crossing Awareness Day began in 2009 in Europe to call attention to the need for public education on railway safety issues as a way to save lives. This year, 39 countries worldwide are holding events in observance of ILCAD. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/mESlkU>.

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